

TETERBORO

Airplane noise continues to wreak havoc on North Jersey residents. Can Bergen fight back?



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Thanks to the area's abundance of airports, living in North Jersey has its advantages for the seasoned traveler.

But when those jets take off? Better cover your ears. Especially if you live near Teterboro.

Teterboro is the busiest private airport in the nation by far, with nearly 182,000 private aircraft having flown in and out in the past year, according to the latest data from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The Port Authority owns and operates the non-commercial airport, which was created to divert traffic from major airports.

The data, collected between May 2023 and May 2024, when compared with flights logged in years past, omitting the impact of the COVID pandemic, shows private travel at the oft-celebrity-used airport has only increased. In addition to rehabilitating the north runway and building a new air traffic control tower to improve controller visibility, the airport is also expected to get an exclusive VIP facility for members of NetJets, which owns and controls the world's largest fleet of luxury private jets.

The company, which is a fixed-base operator and has a private terminal at Teterboro, announced in July its plans to build a private ramp and hangar space, a new owner lounge, VIP conference rooms, a refreshment station, dedicated parking and a host of other amenities.

For residents not far from the airport's two intersecting runways (the airport has four runway ends), the roar of an aircraft overhead may not be slowing anytime soon, causing residents to grow weary of the never-ending noise overhead.

Shh!: These 2 NJ cities are among the noisiest in the U.S. What they're doing to quiet down And more than a few people, including a Girl Scout troop and a deputy mayor who's a member of the Teterboro Aircraft Noise Abatement Advisory Committee, are trying to do something about it.

Residents living to the north — Hackensack and Hackensack University Medical Center, Teterboro and South Hackensack among them — saw, heard and felt many of the 44,467 aircrafts touch down last year on the northern runway at Teterboro, or Runway 19, one of two options to the north for pilots to land. That means 3,240 planes make their final descent over those municipalities north of the airport every month — or about 114 planes roaring overhead each day. Tack on an additional 37 planes departing from the southernmost runway and flying north each day, and Bergen County residents can easily expect 150 planes overhead a day.

Rutherford Girl Scouts taking action

For residents living in southern Bergen County, 56% of all planes departing the airport take off from Runway 6 and an additional 33% of incoming planes land on Runway 6, which accounts for about 2,845 planes each month, or 95 each day, data from the Port Authority from May 2023 through May 2024 shows.

Members of Rutherford Girl Scout Senior Troop 96898 are taking steps to bring attention to the noise and air pollution that has plagued their community for years, taking on valuable research and finding ways to address the issue head-on by reaching out to legislators and working with local officials.

The group of 10 girls, who are between the ages of 14 and 15 and will be sophomores in high school in the fall, are tackling the scouts' Take Action project, a service activity that aims at making significant change on issues that are local, national or global, according to Jennifer Micco, who co-leads the Rutherford troop with Megan Hild.

After speaking to officials in Rutherford, listening to council meeting minutes on YouTube, and diving into historic records, among other actions, the troop's goal isn't to stop pilots from flying, Micco said. Rather, the girls have three goals in mind:

Get a permanent noise monitor placed in Rutherford

Have pilots equally use Runway 1 and 6, both located on the southern end of the airport, with Runway 1 more to the east

Get public support and support from elected officials to continue to keep noise monitoring issues going

Six noise monitors are mounted on utility poles in towns surrounding the airport, but Rutherford does not have one, Micco said. The girls are working with councilwoman Christie Del-Rey Cone, to get one installed in Rutherford. They have drafted a letter for the mayor to approve that would then be sent to the Port Authority and the FAA, Micco said.

Health: Yes, AirPods can damage your hearing. NJ experts share how to protect yourself

Runway 1, which is farther east, is not used much by pilots, but if it were, planes would bypass Rutherford, providing relief to residents, and instead fly over the Meadowlands, Micco said. Roughly 5% of airplanes touched down on Runway 1 over the last year, or about 315 planes each month, and 2% used the runway to depart, according to Port Authority data.

Runway 1 is under construction and likely to reopen in September or October to bring the runway "into compliance" so it could be used safely and GPS equipment can be installed to help pilots safely land, Micco said, so efforts to push for pilots to use that runway will continue at greater length then.

Runway 6 has historically been the easier flight path for pilots due to reasons including wind direction, the girls found in their research, Micco said.

The girls have also reached out to legislators, including Sen. Paul Sarlo, D-Bergen, who advised the troop in an email that he is looking into the airport issues, Micco said.

The troop has also listened to meetings held by the Teterboro Aircraft Noise Abatement Advisory Committee (TANAAC), which was created in the 1980s to address the growing noise complaints at the time. The committee is made up of elected officials from 15 communities within 5 miles of the airport and members of the Port Authority and the FAA. Micco said the girls think it time to revamp the TANAAC members to bring fresh ideas to the table, because meeting after meeting, "nothing seems to change."

While the girls understand that the airplanes that fly overhead won't stop, and in fact the situation may get worse, they are focused on finding ways to mitigate the issues that come from a thriving airport that is the largest of its kind, Micco said.

Teterboro noise abatement committee

Hackensack Deputy Mayor Kathleen Canestrino, who is the TANAAC liaison for the city, stated in May during a council meeting that she felt defeated after attending an April meeting of the TANAAC. The committee meets quarterly, and last came together in April.

The alternate flight path, which the city worked hard to get designed to minimize noise and air pollution, is still not being used by pilots during the day, and very few at night, Canestrino said. The new flight path, which pilots were trained on in July 2021, diverts air traffic away from Hackensack University Medical Center and high-rise buildings along Prospect Avenue.

The airport has done well promoting the alternative path, Canestrino said, but she said discussions need to continue with the Federal Aviation Administration. A couple of "tweaks" to the path are being considered, which may give more success, Canestrino said.

Canestrino also reported that noise levels are up from last year, with a monitor affixed near the top of the hospital averaging noise data of 62.6 decibels in May 2024, compared to 59.5 decibels in May 2023, which she said is a "significant increase" since the data factors in the entire day, including downtime.

The northernmost Runway 19 has the most air traffic at 4 p.m., Canestrino said, with on average, 18 to 20 airplanes flying overhead each hour between 2 and 6 p.m., Canestrino reported. During one hourlong period, data showed 39 airplanes had flown overhead, meaning they were less than a minute apart, she said. She urged residents to continue submitting noise complaints.

The Federal Aviation Administration adopted 65 decibels as the threshold of significant noise exposure not suitable for residential use. To put it into perspective, a normal conversation in an office or restaurant, background music or an air conditioning unit at 100 feet is around 60 decibels, where a washing machine or dishwasher is around 70 decibels. Sounds exceeding 85 decibels could lead to hearing damage, depending on the distance from the source. A lawnmower, for example, is around 90 decibels, where an airplane taking off is closer to 140.

The Port Authority operates a live online map that monitors aircraft noise traffic and the number of flights in the sky at any given moment. Airplanes near Teterboro were ranging decibels between 60 and 73 on a recent evening, with Hackensack ranging from 51 to 68 decibels.

Data from 2020 shows the Teterboro Airport runways reaching decibels of over 90, with surrounding areas as far north as Hackensack University Medical Center and as far south as Route 17 and into East Rutherford ranging between 60 and 69.9 decibels on average, according to a noise map compiled by the U.S. Department of Transportation.